

Baltimore Vacants Reinvestment Council (BVRC)

Minutes

June 3, 2025

Open Works

1400 Greenmount Ave, Classroom 2

Baltimore, MD 21202, USA

11:00 am - 1:00 pm

The meeting recording can be found here: [June 3 2025 BVRC Meeting Recording](#)

BVRC members in attendance:

- Jake Day, Secretary, Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (Council Chair)
- Rebecca Flora, Secretary, Maryland Department of Planning
- Jasmin Torres, Assistant Attorney General, Maryland Office of the Attorney General
- Michael Mocksten, Director, Department of Finance, City of Baltimore
- Leslie McMillan, Co-Chair, BUILD
- Mark Anthony Thomas, President & CEO, Greater Baltimore Committee
- Matt Gallagher, President & CEO, Goldseker Foundation
- Beth Blauer, Associate Vice Provost for Public Sector Innovation & Associate Professor of Practice, Carey Business School
- Otis Rolley, Baltimore City Resident
- Gary McGuigan, Executive Vice President, Maryland Stadium Authority
- John Bullock, Councilmember, Baltimore City Council
- Mary Keller, Maryland Department of Labor

Call to Order

Baltimore Vacants Reinvestment Council Chair Jake Day called the meeting to order. He informed the Board that the meeting was being recorded.

Adoption of Meeting Minutes

Chair Day called for a motion to adopt the minutes from the May 6, 2025 meeting. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the May 6, 2025 minutes were approved.

Monthly Production Report

Henry Waldron, Director of Research and Analytics for Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development, was invited to present the Monthly Production Report. He presented the total number of vacant building notices (VBNs). Chair Day asked for clarification on the benefits of the City issuing failure-to-abate (FTA) notices for buildings with VBNs. Mr. Waldron responded that a FTA encourages property owners to rehabilitate their buildings and creates a lien against the property through which City DHCD can eventually put a property through in-rem foreclosure. Chair Day stated that the presented FTA figures suggest a substantial effort made by Baltimore City code enforcement staff. Ms. Blauer asked for confirmation that the FTA figure is only on VBNs. Mr. Waldron confirmed that the figure had only impacted VBNs. Mr. Mocksten indicated that the FTA figure fed into the overall acquisition figure. Mr. Waldron confirmed that the FTA increased the amount of liens against the property, which would eventually allow the City to place the property into in rem foreclosure and noted that FTAs are not issued to VBNs owned by community partners that are redeveloping the property. Ms. Blauer asked whether there were any tradeoffs to the code enforcement efforts used on VBNs. Mr. Waldron responded that he was unsure and noted that the FTA citations are in concert with usual citations placed on vacant properties, such as high grass. Ms. Blauer stated that review of code enforcement information by the BVRC would be beneficial.

Mr. Waldron continued presenting the monthly production report. Mr. Mocksten noted the positive growth in the acquisition data, and stated that the acquisition effort seems to be building the pipeline the City has envisioned. Ms. Blauer stated that the acquisitions should be prioritized on the target blocks. Ms. McMillan asked whether the acquisitions are being targeted to the city's priority neighborhoods. She also asked whether the additional staff support in the Courts that the Council had spoken about previously would continue increasing acquisitions. Mr. Mocksten stated that staff with City DHCD has already increased and relevant staff with the court system would increase soon so continuing increases in acquisitions were expected, but that he was not qualified to answer questions regarding the location of acquisitions.

Ms. McMillan asked whether acquisitions within targeted blocks could be identified by the next Council meeting. Ms. Blauer noted that the provided data indicates that 58 acquisitions were completed in FY25 in the target blocks. Mr. Gallagher suggested citywide acquisition data and target block acquisition data should be presented together. He stated that the overall trends appear to show the City on pace for a reduction of 5,000 VBNs in the next 5 years, but data should be provided to indicate whether the reduction was occurring on the targeted blocks.

Mr. Thomas noted that this interest in seeing the acquisitions within targeted blocks should be taken as guidance on how to best present the data. Ms. Blauer stated that acquisitions on priority blocks appeared to only be approximately 15% of total acquisitions. Chair Day stated that a targeted block subset for each data category presented in the dashboard would be helpful. Ms. Torres asked whether the two in rem attorneys that MD DHCD had an opening for had been filled. Mr. Waldron stated that he was unsure.

Mr. Waldron continued presenting the monthly production report. He indicated that review of the data had shown that City DHCD realized ground rent acquisitions had been included in the counting of other acquisition methods and that, due to the removal of these, the other acquisitions category would be lower next month.

Chair Day stated that delineation of priority block data should be made and that Mr. Mocksten's point about the increasing pace of acquisitions indicates positive progress. Mr. Gallagher noted that the increasing pace of acquisitions is citywide.

Ms. McMillan asked whether information about the target blocks would be available in July. Chair Day confirmed that there would be and noted that there would be additional conversation on the target blocks during the FY25 Block Level Planning Summary Stats portion of the agenda.

Ms. Torres asked whether the purchasing of ground rents was due to a DHCD policy on only allowing fee simple disposition. Mr. Waldron stated that while he believed the City could dispose of property with ground rent, generally property is disposed of as fee simple.

In response to Ms. Torres' earlier question about hiring two in rem attorneys, Henry responded that one attorney had been hired to focus on acquisitions in the WNADA area. He invited Victoria Olivier with the Mayor's Innovation Team to provide additional information on the hired attorneys. Ms. Olivier indicated that six total attorneys are being hired by City DHCD, with offers out to four, while the dedicated WNADA attorney had been hired. Mr. Gallagher asked whether City DHCD attorneys dedicated to one service area, as one is for the WNADA area, is an option the Council should be considering for other areas. Chair Day stated that committing new attorneys to specific geographies could be a sensible strategy. Ms. McMillan asked how many attorneys would be hired to be dedicated to WNADA. Ms. Torres stated that two attorneys were being hired for the WNADA area. Ms. Olivier indicated that there are two positions hired to focus on the WNADA service area, one inspector and one attorney. Ms. Blauer noted that this was likely a model we should look at for other areas. Chair Day noted that WNADA's funding comes from the state government. Mr. Rolley stated that the dedicated WNADA staff members would work directly for Baltimore City.

Mr. Waldron continued presenting the Monthly Production Report. Chair Day asked whether information is available on who the properties were disposed to. Mr. Waldron stated that this information was available but likely wouldn't be made public. Chair Day stated that he is broadly interested in seeing property dispositions by type of buyer, such as owner-occupants, private developers, and non-profit developers.

FY25 Block Level Planning Summary Stats

Chair Day stated that the Council would address questions regarding the Block Level Planning statistics shared during the May 2025 meeting and invited Ms. Blauer and Mr. Gallaher to start the discussion. Ms. Blauer stated there appeared to be a disconnect between the expressed focus on a whole block approach and the current performance in the target blocks.

Mr. Waldron presented data on the progress that has occurred on the targeted blocks in FY25. He indicated that completion of assigned property strategies on the targeted blocks will increase in the coming months. Mr. Mocksten indicated that the increase in resources for the target block efforts has occurred recently and the impact of those resources will likely not occur until the last few months of 2025.

Mr. Thomas stated that there needs to be clear definitions of which components of the overall strategy are being focused on to better monitor progress. Ms. Blauer stated that a better understanding of the processes and policy changes underlying the data is needed. Chair Day stated that the state's BVRI application was an example of a new strategy that is expected to demonstrate productivity in identified geographies. Mr. Mocksten suggested that the private activity needs to be measured as well. Mr. Thomas stated that a goal needs to be to track the catalytic investment that will create emerging homeownership markets that do not need to be subsidized. Mr. Gallagher stated that the existing data presentation captures all city-wide activity and that he does not see currently an emphasis on the block level planning model in the data. He stated that the current production levels should serve as a baseline from which we will be able to gauge the impact of new resources and updated processes. Mr. Rolley suggested that the data presented to the Council should focus more on systems and inputs rather than production and outputs. Chair Day stated that the Delivery Chain working group will lead considerations and analysis of process improvement. Ms. Blauer stated that there should be tracking of the resources and impacts of the new BVRI funding strategy to allow for such process improvement. Chair Day stated that state DHCD staff will be able to prepare a side-by-side analysis of the use of FY25 and FY26 BVRI funds.

Ms. Blauer indicated that the expectation expressed by Mr. Mocksten is that a noticeable shift should occur in citywide production data due to the process improvement and increased resources. Mr. Gallagher stated that the target block production data should represent a bigger slice of a bigger pie. Mr. Gallagher noted that the reported assigned strategies reflect some properties with multiple strategies. He stated that the Council needed a number of properties with assigned strategies rather than the number of strategies assigned. Mr. Waldron stated that 2,868 properties on the FY25 target blocks have assigned strategies. Chair Day stated that more properties needed an assigned secondary strategy after acquisition in order to plan how each VBN would be abated. Mr. Waldron noted that assigning additional strategies early in the process can also help with tracking by creating benchmarks.

Ms. McMillan asked who assigns property strategies. Mr. Waldron stated that the strategies are assigned during the Block Level Planning process. Mr. Waldron noted that the first consideration in strategy assignment is often whether a property is in rem eligible.

Mr. Rolley asked for clarification whether the 2,868 properties with an assigned strategy for FY25 are all on the 308 FY25 target blocks. Mr. Waldron confirmed that the 2,868 properties represent every vacant building or vacant lot on the 308 FY25 target blocks. Chair Day stated that though certainty around appropriate strategies reduces as projected workplans are farther

in the future, having an initial plan is still important to allow for estimates of resource requirements. Mr. Waldron suggested even prioritizing within the 308 blocks will be required.

Mr. Gallagher asked for additional information about the attendees of FY25 block level planning meetings. Mr. Waldron stated that the relevant individuals associated with executing the assigned strategies, such as neighborhood development officers, are involved in the block level planning process. Mr. Gallagher asked who would be involved in the FY26 block level planning meetings. Mr. Waldron stated the same individuals would be involved in the FY26 block level planning process. Mr. Gallagher noted the need to consider the compounding work requirements of each successive year of planning of the same set of City staff members.

Mr. Mocksten stated that efforts to increase staffing at City DHCD occurred last year in light of the additional work Mr. Gallagher cited. Chair Day asked Mr. Mocksten if he was able to speak at all about staffing requests in the FY26 City budget that is currently under consideration by the City Council. Mr. Mocksten said he was unable to confirm what would be included in the budget since it was still under consideration, but he noted that he felt what he believed was included would be a step in the right direction.

Ms. Blauer noted that there are capacity issues throughout the current processes and that the Council should create strategies for increasing capacity. She also noted that there is currently additional available talent in the job market. Chair Day noted that an important aspect of the capacity conversation is the additional work that will be required of CDOs as they take on additional work and resources. Ms. McMillan asked whether additional target blocks would be identified by the upcoming BVRI award announcements. Chair Day noted that the additional blocks will go through block level planning annually. Ms. Blauer expressed concern that inadequate consideration of capacity issues now would lead to an inability to achieve the stated goals in the future. Chair Day noted that future Council meetings could include presentations from those working to increase the organizational capacity in Baltimore.

Ms. Blauer stated that there needed to be a mechanism to determine the chokepoints as they are happening, rather than rely on review of data. Chair Day asked Ms. Blauer whether she was referring to process mapping. Ms. Blauer confirmed that process mapping would be a good tool as well as developing a subset of data that will show whether or not processes are working. Mr. Gallagher stated that once funding is deployed, there will be dozens of concurrently operating projects which would allow for constant tracking, including review of permit processing timelines. Chair Day noted that additional funding flowing to private development organizations will likely stress the system. Ms. Blauer noted that the Council should consider the capacity of the system before BVRI-funded projects experience delays. Chair Day stated that the Council should consider how best to discuss the process mapping effort within their monthly meetings.

Working Group Updates

Chair Day invited Mr. Gallagher to present on the process of the Delivery Chain Workgroup. He stated that the Delivery Chain Workgroup reviewed the in rem foreclosure process map and requested a chart from the City's Innovation Team that lists the optimal time frame and the

current timeframe for each city acquisition or disposition process. Mr. Rolley asked whether there are additional resources available to outsource analysis to consultants for high priority requests. Mr. Gallagher stated he was not sure how long such a procurement and analysis process would take or cost, but that he believed the City was likely able to provide the information as currently requested. Chair Day noted that ultimately we'll need to dig into the length that each step in the process takes to determine where improvements can be made. Ms. Blauer suggested that such a review may need to occur over time by reviewing several cycles to see where chokepoints exist. Chair Day stated that this sort of analysis may also help determine whether certain steps are worth the time they take and help determine the unseen time constraints of the processes, such as the time it takes an applicant to apply for a permit. Mr. Rolley stated that previous process maps existed for acquisition about 15 years ago during the Process 5000 initiative. Mr. Mocksten stated that while he cannot speak for DHCD, as a representative of the city the mapping that Mr. Rolley has seen is likely still held somewhere and can be made available to the Council. Mr. Gallagher noted that determining the timeline for each process will be an important step in the overall analysis of whether or not process mapping for all acquisition and disposition strategies are available. He also stated that the BVRI funding will create two timetables of active projects that can serve as case studies to review the validity of the timelines. Mr. Thomas noted that these case studies will likely place City government under a microscope by publicly scrutinizing relevant processes. Mr. Mocksten stated that he believes the City will welcome such attention.

Chair Day invited Ms. Blauer to provide an update on the Data Working Group. Ms. Blauer stated that the Data Working Group has determined their processes for receiving and reviewing data requests. Chair Day asked for the Working Group to create a shared space for providing data to the Council. Ms. Blauer noted that they have begun building an inventory of available data.

Chair Day invited Mr. Rolley to provide an update on the Economic Opportunity Working Group. Mr. Rolley stated that the Economic Opportunity Working Group asked for a variety of data, which was provided to the Data Working Group.

Chair Day invited Mr. Thomas and Ms. McMillan to provide an update on the Finance Working Group. Mr. Thomas stated that the Working Group reviewed the components of the \$3 Billion figure to address vacancy in Baltimore. Ms. McMillan stated that due to the varying levels of exposure to the report prepared by PFM amongst Working Group members, a separate meeting was being organized to allow PFM to present their report.

BVRI Update

Chair Day invited Kari Snyder with the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development to present Maryland DHCD's FY26 BVRI Round. Ms. Snyder explained that staff were currently reviewing applications. She also presented available property data from all of the applications that had been received. Ms. McMillan asked for additional clarification of the 1,176 properties listed as privately owned "Ready VBNS." Ms. Snyder explained that for the purposes of this initial data review, ready VBNS were properties with vacant building notices that the

applicant stated they could acquire within six months. Chair Day noted that funding will be competitively distributed and that data on project progress will be made available on a monthly basis.

Ms. Blauer asked whether a breakdown of property data by the City's target blocks is available. Ms. Snyder indicated that state DHCD staff have identified every property submitted by applicants that are on the the City's FY25 property request list. She also stated that all submitted properties have been mapped. Chair Day noted that application reviewers can see which properties are on City target blocks. Mr. Mocksten noted that private acquisition of properties by CDOs is often stalled by City liens preventing sale, but that the BVRI program will test the work the City has done to improve its lien release program. Ms. Snyder stated that City DHCD staff has access to the entire list of submitted properties and is reviewing for in rem eligibility.

Mr. Gallagher asked whether any applications included demolition. Ms. Snyder responded that applicants provided a spreadsheet listing each property and their intended strategy, some of which were demolition. Mr. Gallagher asked whether the demolitions were likely to be approved. Ms. Snyder stated that DHCD staff had informed CDOs that demolition approvals would be on a very limited basis and may only be for emergencies. Mr. Gallagher asked whether demolition projects approved during the BVRI would be eligible to be transferred to MSA. Ms. Snyder said that this transfer would be possible. She stated that the state DHCD's conversations with City DHCD staff will help determine the appropriate actor for each strategy. Mr. Rolley asked whether the committee reviewing applications includes City and State staff. Chair Day responded that City staff are involved in conversations around the submitted property lists, but not in the review committees. Ms. Snyder stated that the application review process includes state staff as well as staff from the Maryland Community Investment Corporation, and all of the property data provided by applicants has been shared with City staff.

Closing

Chair Day stated that the next meeting of the BVRC will be on Tuesday, July 1. Chair Day adjourned the meeting.